Certification in tourism as an element of quality management –theoretical aspects and entrepreneurs' attitudes

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Abstract

Modern management, involving various certificates, is associated with the concept of Total Quality Management (TQM).This is an area of quality management, oriented at continual improvement of a company in all possible aspects of its operations and effectiveness. The obtained results and conducted analysis point to an inevitable development of certification systems, but such systems require transparent assessments, neutrally developed standards and promotion of quality label awareness among consumers. The past multitude of quality labels does not guarantee building a quality brand of an enterprise or a destination.

Index Terms –certification, total quality management, tourism, Poland

TQM includes not only improvement of products and services, but also the quality of performance (employee competences, technology as well as marketing, operation or decision processes). It is important with TQM to recognize broader connections between the company and its environment, both in terms of safety at work and sustainable development.TQM constitutes an integrated approach towards company management and tourist destination, where each aspect of the company's operations is implemented taking into account the quality approach[1]. All employees and partners are involved (hence the growing popularity of clusters and consortia), and the ultimate goal is to satisfy the customer and bring benefits to the company and its employees as well as partners and the local community.

Therefore, various systems and forms of certification have become an element of modern quality management in companies. Fast-growing service marketing and thriving competition have prompted quality-driven measures, e.g. via generating brand awareness in a consumer. According to M. Kachniewska, it is possible to describe desirable attributes of a management system employed in a given company, regardless whether the company produces goods or services [2]. Contrary to what may seem that process is hardly ever used in tourism.

Certification solutions arise from accreditation and standardization solutions established by law[1].

Standardisation is the process of developing and applying standards[2] to reduce diversity and arbitrariness. Standards are developed in the course of standardization to describe a product –an object (good), service, process or institution.

Accreditation is a procedure, whereby an authorized institution appointed by the state authorities recognizes officially that a given organization or person is authorized (competent) to perform certain standardization tasks. Accreditation also means that certification organizations are authorized to certificate goods, personnel or management systems.

Certification is a procedure held by an independent organization to determine whether there is an adequate degree of certainty that a properly marked product, process or service meets a particular standard or other standardization documents. Accordingly, accreditation is a confirmation of authority within a determined scope of works, whereas certification is a confirmation of conformity to specified requirements[3].

CERTIFICATION IN TOURISM

Implementation of global or European standards in system management, processes or services faces serious difficulties in the case of Polish tourism operators due to several economic and social factors. However, the situation has been improved as a result of regulation of the EU service market by the Services Directive. Scholars and politicians see standardization as a tool to liberalize trade in services, while some operators of the tourism industry find standardization of tourism services unfavorable. Nonetheless, the Polish tourist market has witnessed a growing interest in various certificates.

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[1] In Poland accreditation and certification is tackled by Polish Centre for Accreditation (PCA) and Polish Centre of Research and Certification

[2] In Poland, the term standardization was defined in the Act of 12 September 2002 on standardization (Dz.U. of 2002, no. 169, item 1386) as an activity aimed at achieving an optimal, under given circumstances, level of ordering in the given scope by determining provisions concerning the existing and possible problems for common and multiple use

[3] The legal basis for the system of accreditation, certification and research in Poland is the Act of 30 August 2002 on the system of conformity assessment and the Act of 15 December 2006 on amendment of the Act on the system of conformity assessment and some other acts, which entered into force on 7 January 2007.

Tourism operators do not need to apply for mandatory certificates; however, they commonly use goods which require the CE mark indicating that the product meets essential requirements of the directives and, consequently, is safe for use. This is particularly true for hotel equipment.

Voluntary certificates may be divided into two groups: industry-specific certificates as well as certificates and award certificates for several sectors, also relevant for the tourism sector. Tourism sector certificates are awarded in the hospitality industry to tourist products by various organisations, associations, institutions, universities, magazines and local governments. Some of them are award certificates, without detailed procedures, intended as a recommendation for the customer.

Furthermore, certification system of tourism services plays a major role in the draft Tourism Development Programme for Poland by 2020[3]. The main objective includes "strengthening product and quality certification systems as one of marketing and promotional values of tourism services."

As stated in the explanatory statement: "The certification process for services and products of the tourism sector should be based upon the strengthening of the national quality management system in tourism and meet the EU guidelines. Under *the Directive on services in the internal market*, standardization and certification applies to (tourist) consumer services as well as transport and recreational services, sports centres and theme parks. This approach provides for integration of management systems and establishment of internal systems, e.g. quality statements for particular tourism services or products. According to the EU Directive, development of new standards for tourism services and products shall become the basis for competitiveness of services. Management and certification systems of tourism services should be organised by determining specific requirements for particular types of tourism services."

NATIONAL CERTIFICATES IN TOURISM

Quality systems are often not very cohesive and rather uncoordinated. They focus on the objective of individual sectors or regions and fail to consider the integrated approach on a pan-European scale. The divisions of this type stand in the way of uniform conditions of high quality services in the whole of Europe, which may in turn have a negative impact on the competitiveness of the European tourism sector. The consultations that have presently started in the EU, aim at getting an opinion of a wide range of public and private entities, as well as natural persons on what the EU could do in the case. One of the possible activities considered by the Commission involves submission of an application on the European quality label in tourism for the needs of initiatives of quality systems. This could increase the transparency and cohesiveness of the quality assessment at the EU level. The European quality label would be awarded to the existing and planned tourism quality systems, which meet the common European criteria. The Table below demonstrates the different certificates existing to date in many EU countries.

TABLE I. TOURISM QUALITY CERTIFICATES IN THE SELECTED EU COUNTRIES

Country	Name	Ownership
Bulgaria	Authentic Bulgaria	Public-Private Partnership
the Czech Republic	NTQS –National Tourism Quality System	public
Denmark	Active Danemark	Public-Private Partnership
Estonia	People Committed to Quality	public
England	National Quality Assurance Scheme	public
Sweden, Denmark, Hungary, Switzerland	European Hospitality Quality	private
Finland	Quality 1Q00	Public-Private Partnership
Hungary	Hungarian Tourism Quality Award	private
Ireland	Quality Assurance	public
France	QualiteTourisme	Public-Private Partnership
Spain	SICTED- Integral Quality Destination Management System	Public-Private Partnership
Malta	Quality Assured	public

Source: own compilation

CERTIFICATION IN HOTEL INDUSTRY

The hotel sector most often uses certification systems and introduces its own certificates on a voluntary basis[4]. A specific group of certificates for hotels are, definitely, the quality certificates for customer service. The following are covered by audits conducted at the order of certification authorities: registration processes, level of service in the hotel restaurant, possibilities of communication in foreign languages with the hotel staff or the availability and attractiveness of additional offers.

"[…] Quality certificates fulfill several important functions. –the function of the product brand is to: guarantee, promote and identify. The same is the function of quality certificates, and the identification function should be especially noted –certificates distinguish products (or companies) labelled with them from a number of others, even the so-called brand-name products."

Monika Trojan –Polish Prestige Hotels& Resorts Foundation

The hotels are also awarded certificates linked to other areas of their activity. These include e.g.: green certificates (linked to the implementation of the CSR strategy), regional certificates (confirming that a given facility is a unique place in the given region and emphasising its contribution to the functioning and development of the local community), certificates for facilities friendly to a specific segment (e.g. the disabled, children). There are also competitive certification systems as in the segment of wellness&spa. Finally, in the hotel industry there exists, especially in non-chain hotels, a voluntary standardisation which is a specific form of categorisation outside of the national legal systems. The following Table illustrates some of such certifications.

TABLE2. SELECTED QUALITY CERTIFICATES IN THE EUROPEAN HOTEL INDUSTRY

ECARF-Qualitätssiegel	The quality label of the European Centre for Allergy Research Foundation (ECARF) is a certificate attesting to the quality of products and services adequate for allergy sufferers.
Service-Q-Deutschland	The Service-Q-Germany certificate guarantees high quality services provided in organisations belonging to the "Service Q"quality management system.
Tourisme& Handicap	The "Tourisme& Handicap"certificate is a response to the needs of the disabled who want to freely select the places of their rest and recreation. It stands for the guarantee of proper service.
Mercure Quality Guarantee	Accor group certificates for the Mercure brand hotels.
Thalassa sea & spa	Accor group brand entirely dedicated to caring for the customer's well-being, allows them to use the services of

	qualified thalassotherapy and spa professionals right by the sea.
Carbon Neutral Meeting Hotel	The certificate means that the hotel organises meetings neutral to carbon dioxide and the costs of carbon dioxide emission generated during the meeting are incurred not by the customer but by the hotel.
Green Tourism	The green tourism programme awards certificates to hotel which aim at introduction of visible changes in the manner of running their activity so far, focusing mainly on reduction of energy use.
Sustainable Bonn	Green location of a conference –a certificate aimed at ensuring green and environment-friendly location of a conference in hotels and restaurants
Green Key	Certification of tourism facilities which meet the international standards regarding the responsibility for the natural environment, cooperation with the local community and building the environmental awareness of stakeholders.

Source: own compilation

CERTIFICATION OF THE DESTINATION PRODUCT

As part of brand awareness of destinations and their branding many countries introduce national, regional, local or product Visual Identification Systems based on certification systems. These most often are to point out the character of the tourism product (cities-sanctuaries, stork villages, unusual gardens, green stations, villages covered in flowers, heritage of the 20th century).

CERTIFICATION OF TRAVEL AGENCIES

The Polish tourism industry does not agree on the issue of certification of travel agencies. Some of its representatives are of the opinion that there are economic and image-related benefits from certificates and membership in trade organisations (associations, chambers). Others see no need to make themselves more visible to the customer and no benefits arising from certificates building trust and recommendations considering them as elements that do not build trust. The certification of travel agencies in Poland is conducted by different organisations, which include such entities as: RóżaKolumba, Odys or TransparentnyTouroperator. Their prestige, brand awareness among customers and transparency of procedures are, however, highly debatable probably because they are not covered by standardisation and some of them are provided against payment.

ATTITUDES OF ENTREPRENEURS TO CERTIFICATION ON THE BASE OF RESEARCH

In order to verify the attitudes of entrepreneurs on the existing and potential certification systems, in October and November 2013, a research was conducted (on the Polish market) based on IDI which covered the following groups of entrepreneurs: independent hotels (5 people), chain hotels (3 people), tour operators of inbound tourism (5 people) and experts (3 people). The analysis was supplemented with opinions from secondary sources –trade press [5].

The opinions of entrepreneurs are clearly differentiated, but the hoteliers are most interested in getting quality and brand certificates. The respondents point to the payments for certificates as a factor reducing their interest. It is considered that the offer of certificates should clearly define the benefits and competitive advantage on the market.

> A certificate –apart from the prestige and satisfaction on account of solutions aimed at environmental protection –implies also other benefits that are extremely important to the owners of hotels and guesthouses, i.e. financial benefits following from savings in energy, water, detergents, etc.
>
> Head of Sales and Marketing - Branicki Hotel, Białystok

> It is better to use the energy and funds, which would have been used for getting a trade award, for more tangible promotion tools.
>
> Funclub

> A certificate brings numerous benefits: it is conductive to earning the trust of stakeholders, especially guests which builds the grounds for efficient business relations; it gives an advantage on the competitive market since not all entities have such certificates; it increases the opportunity of winning new markets and ensures that the hotel managers effectively manage the facility and seek to achieve the designated objectives; it increases the prestige on the market and gives raise to pride of one's own employs and business partners; it triggers the need for changes, new initiatives and favours the establishment of new creative attitudes; it reduces the need for audits of customers since the fact of owning a certificate eliminates the need to conduct such audits.
>
> Office of the PPH&R Foundation

In order to obtain the Green Key certificate we underwent a complicated audit procedure which confirmed that our hotels are managed in an environment-friendly manner and that the guests staying at our hotels can be sure that we care for the environment and environmental education of our staff.

Spokesperson of the Starwood Hotels & Resorts

The results of IDI survey allow dividing the opinions into two groups. One covers positive attitudes the other represents the arguments of those having negative approach to certification.

TABLE3. ATTITUDES OF ENTREPRENEURS TO QUALITY CERTIFICATION

Positive	Negative
they establish the credibility of the company	no certificates will affect the sales numbers
some of them, like ISO, are even required in the hotel industry	companies awarding the certificates are only interested in the commercial effect
the certificate can help to make the offer more reliable for the customer	certificates can be bought and it does not give evidence of quality
recommendations help to enter the "information flow"	chambers of commerce in the area of tourism have no moral right to introduce recommendations as this divides hotels into "better"and "worse"
I can apply for a certificate and pay for it as long as I will see economic benefits over a short period of time	there is too many different diplomas, certificates on the market and they attest to nothing

Own compilation

Thus a SWOT analysis of the perspectives to introduce certification in tourism may be attempted. The result of the analysis in the field of introduction of certification systems clearly points to a maxi-maxi position[6].

Strengths	Weaknesses
consumers basing their purchase decisions on various forms and sources of recommendations	low level of management through quality, no knowledge of entrepreneurs and no mental

	approval for TQM
an element of TQM (Total Quality Management)	dominance of discretionary diplomas and certificates (and free-of-charge) over certificates based on procedures (and awarded against payment
better brand awareness and standardisation of services	no confirmed impact of certification on the sales numbers, which gives raise to reluctance to subject oneself to such management tool
achieving competitive advantage	inordinate categories in may services, especially regarding accommodation
	low brand awareness of quality labels among the consumers
Opportunities	**Threats**
low share of certified products on the market of tourism services	multitude of certificates will lower recognition of their quality
including certification into the government strategy of tourism development by 2020	resistance towards standardisation in groups of entrepreneurs
role of certification in the tourism policy of the European Union	own standards in chain hotel industry
pressure of demand on quality labelled services	failure to recognise the economic benefits following from quality labels by the certified entities
growing awareness of the entrepreneurs	
growing requirements of group customers or OTAs as regards confirmed quality standards	
no standardisation in the segment of accommodation base on rural areas	
failure to distinguish destination products (villages/holiday resorts, places with flowers or	

for children, etc.)	

The obtained results and conducted analysis point to an inevitable development of certification systems, but such systems require transparent assessments, neutrally developed standards and promotion of quality label awareness among consumers. The past multitude of quality labels does not guarantee building a quality brand of an enterprise or a destination.In order to function correctly, a non governmentorganisation must be based on equal and fair communication especially in terms of geographical regions which may bring the desired results in the long term.[7].

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